

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: February 16, 2012

Agenda Item: Bison Management Harvest

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Final Rule

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 20 minutes

Background

Bison management continues to evolve in Montana. An Environmental Assessment has been prepared for proposed adaptive management adjustments to the Interagency Bison Management Plan. Proposed adjustments include allowing bison on U.S. Forest Service and other lands north of Yellowstone National Park and south of Yankee Jim Canyon. Bison would not be allowed north of the hydrological divide between Dome Mountain/Paradise Valley and the Gardiner Basin on the east side of the Yellowstone River, and Tom Miner basin and the Gardiner Basin on the west side of the river.

Additionally, at its Dec. 9, 2011 meeting the FWP Commission approved the recommended translocation of quarantined bison to the Fort Peck and Fort Belknap reservations, contingent upon successful negotiation of management plans with the respective tribes. Prior to movement, management plan agreements with each Tribe will include response protocol for bison outside specific translocation areas.

In response to these and other activities aimed at enhancing the number and types of potential bison management tools, FWP is proposing a process to provide licensed hunters—or hunters selected from a randomized list—an opportunity to harvest bison outside defined tolerance areas and likely outside Montana’s normal bison hunting season. The proposal focuses on formally identified tolerance areas and times in the Greater Yellowstone Area and defined areas where bison have been translocated. This may include significant bison hunting opportunities during or outside the bison hunting season. These opportunities would become “bison management harvests.” Each bison management harvest opportunity will reflect the rules, regulations and expectations of Montana’s FWP Commission annually approved bison hunting season. This additional tool is intended to complement existing management efforts that include hazing and harvests. While some situations may not easily accommodate hunters due to rough terrain, other situations may not require hunting. In summary, this proposal does not require hunters for every situation where bison are or may be outside tolerance areas and times.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The concepts behind this proposal reflect conversations with regional and Helena FWP staff and the Montana Department of Livestock. Legislative debate and statute has also influenced its development. Comment will include general public opportunities to include county commissions. DOL will also be asked to review the specific details of this proposal. Public comment on any proposed rule adopted by the FWP Commission on Jan. 19 will run through 5 p.m. Feb. 13, with comments forwarded to the Commission. Any final adoption will take place Feb. 16. Given the open public comment period at the time of this writing, elements of this proposal may change.

Alternatives and Analysis

Proposals may be adopted as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, with deletions or no change from 2011 (status quo) as per staff justifications, public comment and/or commission discussion.

Proposed Motion

I move the FWP Commission approve the use of hunters for bison management harvests as presented by FWP.